RAH-66 Comanche: The Self-Inflicted Termination

Exploring the Dynamics of Change in Weapons Procurement

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An Unusual Case of Program Termination

- Cancellation : Army decision
- 2004: the RAH-66 was – finally – on track
- Few in the Army were reluctant to terminate it

<u>Stated Reason for Termination</u>:

- Restore the balance in the Aviation budget

Remaining Question

- How the program went from a top priority status down to a termination nobody seriously opposed in the Army?

Approach and methodology

- Decision-making process (1983-2004)
  - Official documents and interviews

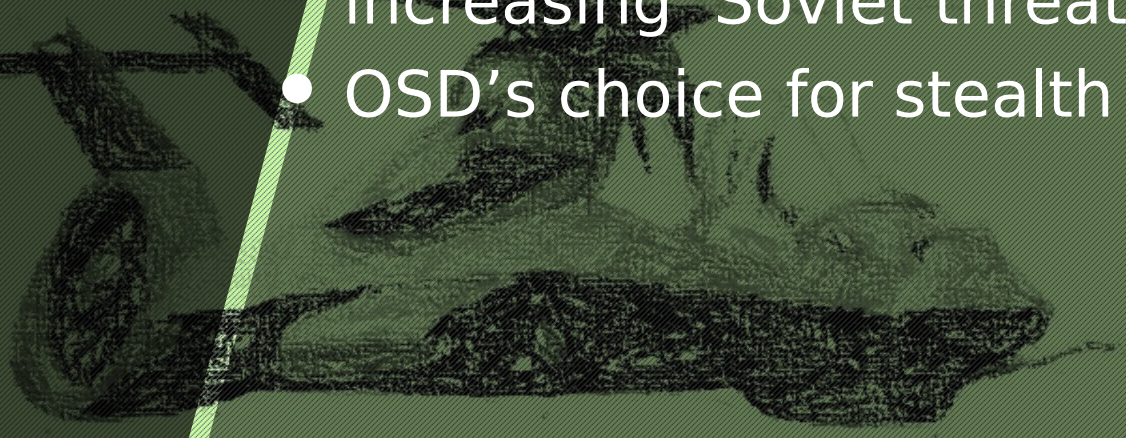
The « Flying Humvee »

- AirLand Battle doctrine
- A versatile airframe
- LHX : consensus between the Aviation branch and the Army civilian leadership

“Humvee is a very good engine and chassis you can reconfigure; it can be an ambulance, it can be a truck, it can carry a machine gun, it can do a lot of things. Ambrose wanted a helicopter just like that.” (P. L. Francis, personal communication, November 18, 2010)

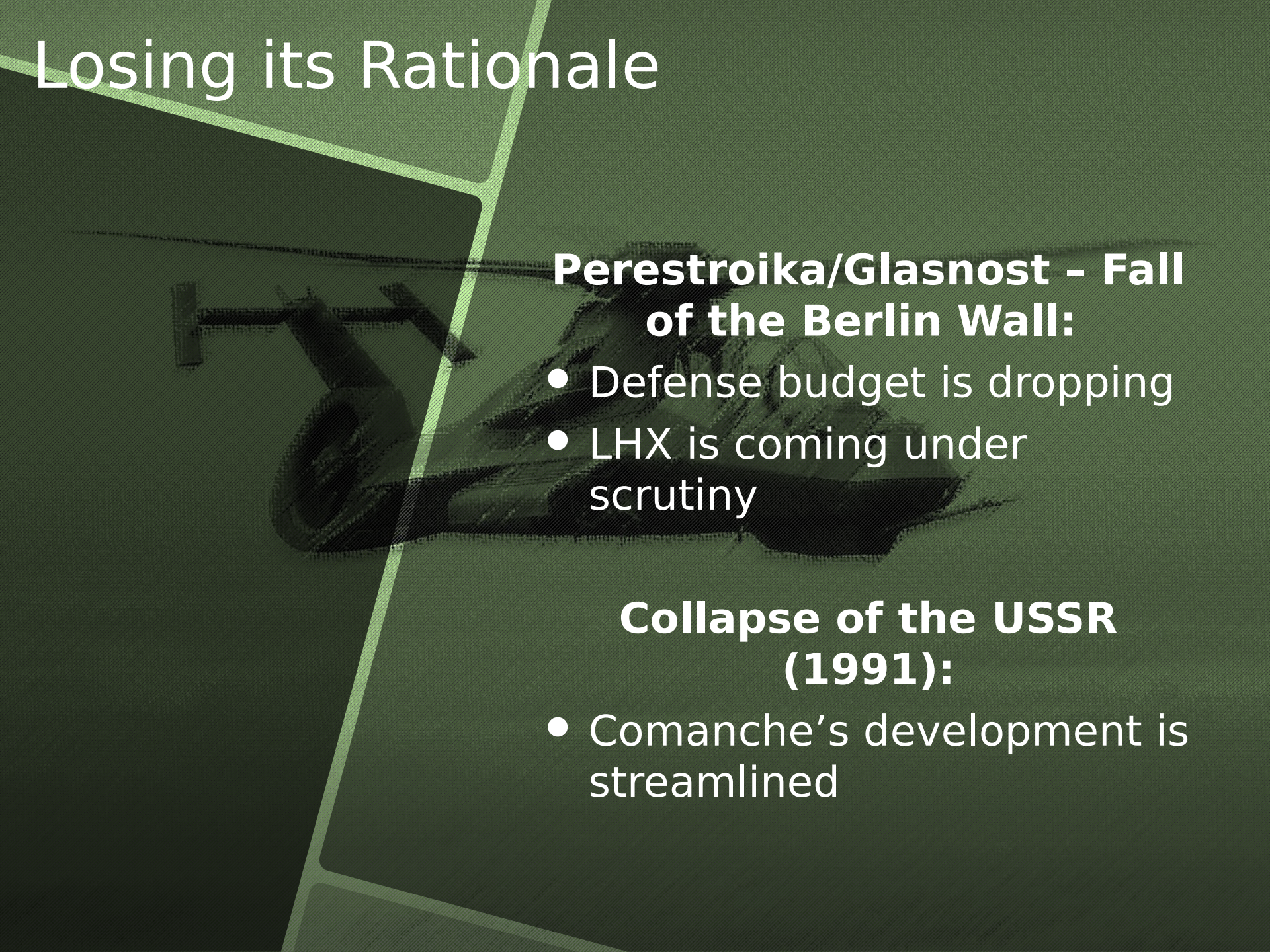
The Stealth Requirement

- Western perception of an increasing Soviet threat
- OSD's choice for stealth



[…] *in attack aircraft that would need to penetrate hostile airspace, there was an emerging consensus on the need to reduce the signature of the airplanes in every dimension, and stealth was a particularly salient element of that debate in the 1980s.* (D. S. C. Chu, personal communication, June 27, 2011)

Losing its Rationale



Perestroika/Glasnost – Fall of the Berlin Wall:

- Defense budget is dropping
- LHX is coming under scrutiny

Collapse of the USSR (1991):

- Comanche’s development is streamlined

Finding a New Role inside the Army

Two issues for the RAH-66 :

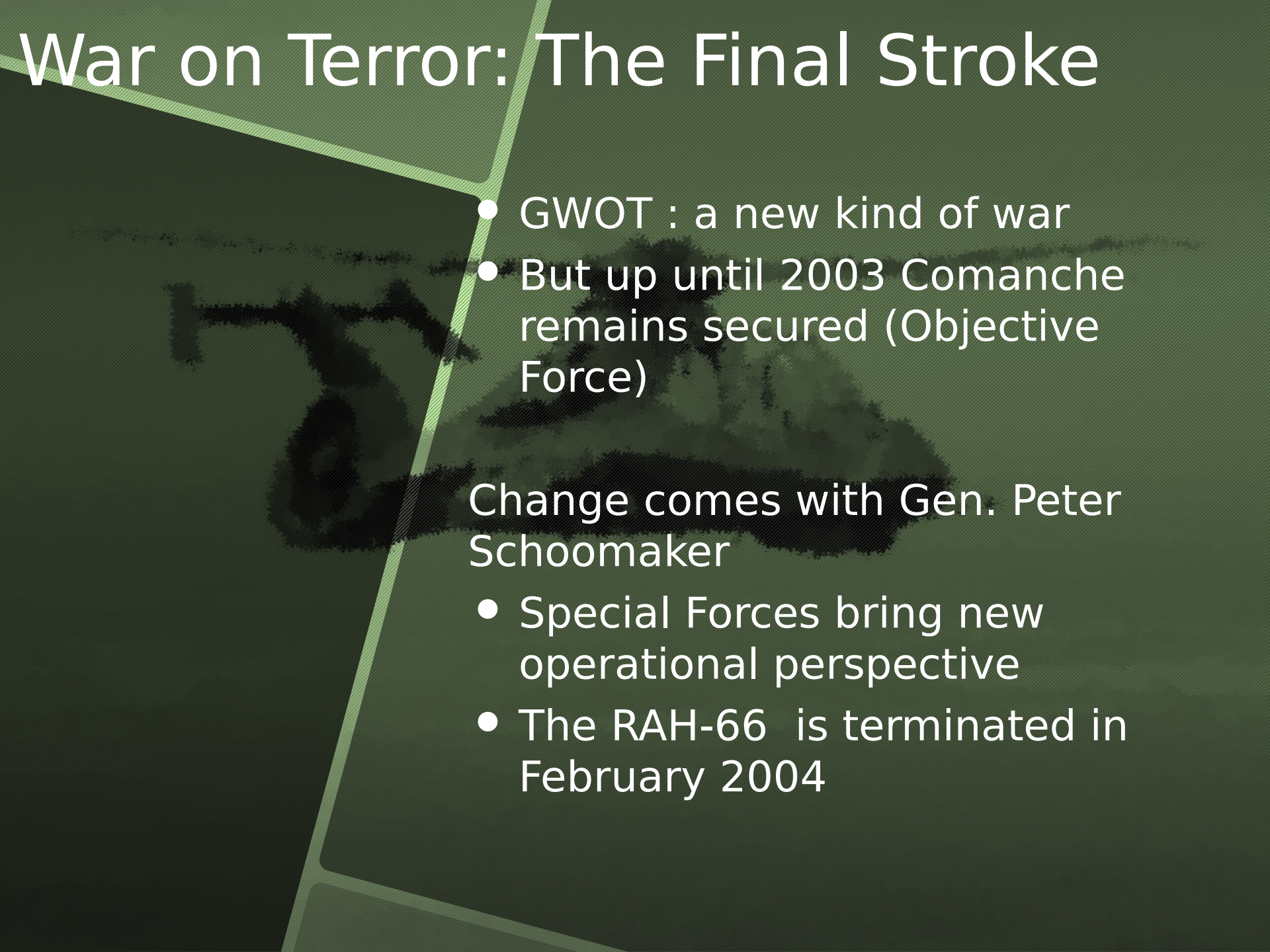
- Budget
- Mission

Program office/TRADOC strategy:

- Build flying prototypes
- Increase Comanche's ISR capabilities

…but the initiative has conflicting effects

War on Terror: The Final Stroke



- GWOT : a new kind of war
- But up until 2003 Comanche remains secured (Objective Force)

Change comes with Gen. Peter Schoomaker

- Special Forces bring new operational perspective
- The RAH-66 is terminated in February 2004

Conclusion

- Lack of a broad-based support, fluctuating commitment
- The program was transformed into an ISR platform to secure an incontestable role within the Army
- But Comanche's constituency had remained fragile: after Shinseki departure, the subsequent merger of the Army's and OSD's operational perspectives killed the program
- Service's support for a given program can significantly change over time, and has to be examined in order to explain termination